

Message Text

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20/45

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7771

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

DIA

DEA HQS WASHDC

CINCPAC

USSAG NKP

13TH ADVON UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16744

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: READINGS OF THE POLITICAL BAROMETER IN BANGKOK THROUGH
OCTOBER 26

REF BANGKOK 16425

CINCPAC FOR POALD

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SUMMARY: THE SANYA GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DEVELOP ITS
CONSERVATIVE, CARETAKER IMAGE. IN PUBLIC INTERVIEWS VARIOUS
MINISTERS STRESS CONTINUITY AND LOW MILITARY PROFILE. A NUMBER
OF OFFICIALS HAVE PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY SAID THAT THE THAI MILI-

TARY SYSTEM WILL BE REORANIZED WITH THE CONVERSION OF THE SUPREME COMMAND STRUCTURE INTO A CONCEPT SOMEWHAT LIKE THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT IS BETTING MOST OF ITS PRESTIGE ON THE CONSTITUTION IT HAS PROMISED THE COUNTRY. THE JUSTIC MINISTER ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENTS TO THE CONSTITUION DRAFTING COMMITTEE, A UNIQUE COLLECTION OF LEGA SPECIALISTS AND PUBLIC FIGURES. BANGKOK IS SWAMPED WITH RUMORS AND VITUPERATIONS PRIMARILY CONCERNING FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT AND HIS SON-IN-LAW COL. NARON KITTIKACHORN. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK OUTLINED HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES BEFORE THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) OCTOBER 25. HIS WORDS, AND THE USE OF THE THANOM GOVERNMENT'S APPOINTED NLA AS A FORUM, UNDERLINE SANYA'S VIEW THAT HIS IS A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT (BANGKOK 16742). FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN NA AYUTTHAYA ALSO GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE OCTOBER 25 WHICH STRESSED CONTINUITY OVER CHANGE (BANGKOK 16705).

2. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT AND THE ARNSD FORCES HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE PRESENT SUPREME COMMAND STRUCTURE WILL BE CONVERTED INTO A JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF (JCS) CONCEPT. LT. GENERAL KRIS SIVARA, ROYAL THAI ARMY (RTA) COMMANDER, INFORMED US THAT DURING THE OCTOBER 22 CABINET MEETING HE RECOMMENDED THAT NO ONEBE APPOINTED TO THE RANK OF FIELD MARSHAL AND THAT THE SUPREME COMMAND STRUCTURE BE ABOLISHED (BANGKOK 16622). WHETHER THE SWITCH FROM A SUPREME COMMAND TO A JCS WILL REPRESENT ANYTHING MORE THAN A CHANGE OF FORM, OR WHETHER THE NEW JCS CHAIRMAN WOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO THE DEFENSE MINISTER, ARE CURRENTLY UNSETTLED QUESTIONS.

3. PRIME MINISTER SANYA WROTE A SHORT, BUT HANDWRITTEN, THANK YOU NOTE TO "THE NATION" IN RESPONSE TO THE EDITORIAL STAFFS' OPEN LETTER PUBLISHED OCTOBER 24. FOR THAILAND, SANYA'S WAS AN UNUSUAL AND CONSIDERATE GESTU
, OTHER MINISTRIES
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HAVE PICKED UP THE PRIME MINISTER'S PUBLIC RESPONSIVENESS. DEFENSE MINISTER AIR CHIEF MARSHAL DAWEE CHULLASAP SAID IN A RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE HOPED TO MEET THE PRESS "CONSTANTLY."

4. THE NEW POLICE LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO ANNOUNCE CHANGES AND NEW ASSIGNMENTS. THIS MOLTING AND SHEDDING PROCESS, PLUS POLICE DIRECTOR-GEMLRAL PRACHUAB SUNTHARANGKUL'S REPEATED STATEMENTS THAT CORRUPTION AND MALFEASANCE WILL BE ATTACKED, ARE DESIGNED TO RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND IMPROVE THE IMAGE AND PERFORMANCE OF THE POLICE. PRACHUAB HAS PARTICULARLY SINGLED OUT THE IMMIGRATION AND SPECIAL BRANCH UNITS. IF THE NEWCOMERS PROVE CAPABLE AND HONEST, THE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS A CHANCE TO RECOUP ITS STANDING IN THAI SOCIETY

(SEPTEL).

5. ALTHOUGH SMALL STUDENT GROUPS HAVE MATERIALIZED, THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND NSCT) RETAINS ITS PARAMOUNT POSITION. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT AND THE KING WORK CLOSELY WITH THE NSCT, THEREBY BUTTRESSING THE MODERATE NSCT LEADERSHIP AGAINST POSSIBLE CENTRIFUGAL FORCES WITHIN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT. LT. GENERAL SAIYUD KERDPHOL CONTINUES TO PLAY A KEY LIAISON ROLE BETWEEN THE ESTABLISHMENT AND THE NSCT (BANGKOK 16642).

6. GROUPS OF STUDENT LEADERS IN BANGKOK AND CHIANG MAI, PARTICULARLY THOSE FROM VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS, HAVE ENTERED THE BUDDHIST MONKHOOD FOR A SHORT PERIOD IN EXPIATION OF THE VIOLENCE WHICH OVERTHREW THE THANOM GOVERNMENT. BURIAL RITES FOR STUDENTS OF VARIOUS RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS HAVE BEEN HELD OVER THE PAST WEEK. THE TRAGEDY OF THE VIOLENCE IN BANGKOK IS BROUGHT TO THE ENTIRE COUNTRY AS STUDENT BODIES RETURN TO THEIR HOME PROVINCES. THE PITSANULOK GOVERNOR'S IRREVERENCE AT ONE OF THESE OCCASIONS SPARKED A DEMONSTRATION (BANGKOK 16591).

7. JUSTICE MINISTER PRAKOB HUTASINGHA, CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE, ANNOUNCED THE NAMES OF THE OTHER 17 DRAFTERS. PRIME MINISTER SANYA EXPLAINED IN A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE CHOSEN FOR THEIR "SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE" AND FOR THEIR "WIDE EXPERIENCE IN RELATIONS CONFIDENTIAL

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WITH THE PEOPLE." THE GROUP DOES INDEED INCLUDE EMINENT LEGALISTS AND DRAFTERS OF PREVIOUS CONSTITUTIONS, AS WELL AS JOURNALISTS AND ACADEMICIANS. YOUNG, WESTERN-EDUCATED THAI ARE ALSO INCLUDED. MUCH OF THE PRESTIGE AND SUCCESS OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL REST ON THE DOCUMENT SCHEDULED TO BE PRODUCED UNDER SANYA'S THREE-MONTH DEADLINE (BANGKOK 16643).

8. THE RUMOR MILLS IN BANGKOK HAVE CHURNED OUT HIGHLY IMAGINATIVE MATERIAL, MOSTLY CENTERED ON FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN AND COL. NARONG KITTIKACHORN. POLICE COL. PRAMUAN VANIGPHAND, FORMER HEAD OF THE POLICE NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION OFFICE AND PRESENTLY SERVING 25 YEARS FOR TAKING BRIBES FROM KNOWN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS, ADDED TO THE MOUNTING VITUPERATIONS. HIS ACCUSATION THAT PRAPHAT AND NARONG ARE "THE BIGGEST DRUG TRAFFICKERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA" APPEARS DESIGNED TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT PRAMUAN WAS RAILROADED AND SHOULD BE RELEASED (BANGKOK 16566). PRAMUAN'S STORY, ALONG WITH RUMORS THAT NARONG PERSONALLY MACHINEGUNNED DEMONSTRATORS FROM A HELICOPTER, HAVE NO TRACEABLE BASIS IN FACT. THE NEWSPAPERS ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO THE FEARS THAT THESE RUMORS GENERATE. THE THAI FOURTH ESTATE WILL HAVE TO SHOW GREATER RESPONSIBILITY IF THE NEWLY-WON DEMOCRACY IS TO PROSPER.

9. POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY REMAINS MUTED. THE FORMER DEMOCRATIC PARTY, WHICH HAS A LONG HISTORY AS AN OPPOSITION FORCE THROUGH THE MYRIAD OF PAST CIVILIAN AND MILITARY GOVERNMENTS, APPEARS TO BE REORGANIZING ITSELF FOR THE FUTURE. ONE INNOVATION WHICH SEEMS TO BE UNDER SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IS A STRENGTHENING OF PARTY DISCIPLINE.

10. ALTHOUGH THE SANYA GOVERNMENT IS ESSENTIALLY PLAYING A CARE-TAKER ROLE, IT NEEDS TO PROVE TO THE PUBLIC THAT IT IS A GOVERNMENT OF SUBSTANCE THAT WILL EASE THE MOVEMENT TOWARD DEMOCRACY. THE NEWSPAPERS FREQUENTLY PRINT GOADING ARTICLES SAYING THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS ABOUT TO LOWER THE BOOM IN THE THUNG YAI HUNTING SCANDAL (BANGKOK 15088) AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF KORAT GOVERNOR PRAMUAN SATTHATHIP IN A MURDER (BANGKOK 16351). ALTHOUGH NOTHING HAS OCCURRED YET, THE RTG CAN DISPLAY ITS CREDENTIALS BY A FAIRLY RAPID HANDLING OF THESE TWO MAJOR CORRUPTION AND PRIVATE PRIVILEGE SCANDALS.
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